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## [Navy Chaplains team with Navy Medicine Mental Health for care and compassion](#)

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*By Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs*

The five distinctive corps associated with Navy Medicine – Dental Corps, Hospital Corps, Medical Corps, Medical Service Corps, and Nurse Corps – are also supported by several other corps such as the Judge Advocate General Corps and Supply Corps.

There's also the Navy Chaplain Corps that provides distinctive assistance throughout Navy Medicine.

When a Navy chaplain is assigned to a military treatment facility such as Naval Hospital Bremerton (NHB), their broad range of duties helps the overall mission of Navy Medicine to enable readiness, wellness and patient-centered care of Sailors, Marines, their families and all others entrusted in their care.

Along with ecumenical duties, they also handle such responsibilities as counseling individuals seeking guidance and spiritual direction if requested, and care, compassion and concern to hospitalized personnel and/or family members.



According to NHB Command Chaplain Cmdr. Bruce Crouterfield, a key obligation of a Navy chaplain is being engaged in the daily lives of the staff members at the command they are assigned, as well as available to all beneficiaries. A Navy chaplain provides a ministry of presence, offering guidance and insight whenever and wherever needed.

NHB's pastoral care has two Navy chaplains assigned as 'special assistants' to command leadership, and they are also involved in several support roles with NHB's mental health department and Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program (SARP).

"SARP and mental health are obviously very much a part of the world of psychology, but when we look at that word, psychology, we find that it's a compound word. 'Psyche' is Greek for 'soul' or 'spirit' and 'ology' means 'the study of.' Chaplains, thus, are interested in the soul or the spirit. In many ways pastors and the clergy were the first psychologists. People would go to their pastor for pastoral care when their soul or spirit was troubled. So, there's a millennia of tradition wherein pastors, or chaplains, are brought in to provide care for those with troubled souls. Moreover, they are specially trained in this type of care, what we might refer to as 'Pastoral Care.' For many, the essence of faith, the essence of religion, the essence of pure faith, is found in caring for others," explained Crouterfield.

One of the most important traits for a Navy chaplain in regards to supporting Navy Medicine and mental health is empathy.

"Empathy means to feel what another is feeling. When true empathy happens between two people, it can change lives. Another good word here is 'compassion,' which is another compound word. 'Passion' means to suffer and so 'compassion' means to 'suffer with' another. To be empathetic or compassionate means to join someone on their holy ground of suffering and be willing to stand there with them, to accompany them, be a companion to them in what they are feeling, experiencing, and what they are living with. When true empathy and compassion are experienced, one may experience what it's like to be comforted. There are many conditions, circumstances, and realities in life that just cannot be fixed such as terminal cancer, but that doesn't mean a person cannot be comforted by one who is willing to join them on their holy ground of suffering and suffer with them, although that condition may not be able to be 'fixed.' Then there are other moments when a person is liberated from some burden only because

there was someone who was willing to listen to their story, join them on that holy ground and be willing to stand there and refuse to leave. Then, in that experiential knowing of compassion they are liberated, freed, unshackled from the burden and pain that's been reigning over them," Crouterfield said.

Crouterfield notes that it is often very helpful for Navy chaplains to work with mental health professions in caring for people because of the different roles and sense of identity chaplains have in contrast to clinical professionals.

"In the minds of many, chaplains are a symbol of hope. But it's more than that, it's a transcendent hope. Chaplains are symbols, reminders, or even bearers of the presence of God that can arouse a passion for the promises of the future. For many this becomes a catalyst for change. It becomes a source for endurance. It's something for people to hold on to until they can begin to see and put together a new tomorrow for themselves," said Crouterfield.

Mental health deals with improving the lives of those who suffer from a mental or behavioral disorder. Navy chaplains assist with providing support for psychological distress.

"Often, when people are in psychological stress, the best medicine for that person is simply to 'feel heard.' I'd also use the phrase, 'to feel felt.' Chaplains who specialize in pastoral care are trained listeners. They know how to listen in a therapeutic way and they know how to probe and ask the right questions as the troubled person processes that distress. Simply listening to someone's story in an empathetic, compassionate way, even without the intention of 'fixing them' can change their life. Imagine for a moment that there are people around us living lives of quiet desperation, but have no one who will really listen to them without making them feel judged, or disempowered, or weak and small. But a good chaplain knows how to listen with empathy and compassion and in such a way that can bring hope and a revived passion for the future," stated Crouterfield.

Chaplains at NHB have also been involved in SARP on a regular basis, such as sitting in group sessions, much to the surprise of more than one patient.

"I have heard others say that they had never seen a Navy chaplain involved with SARP. They all have initially thought that I'm there for some personal reason and make a joke about sacrificial wine," said Lt. Shawn Redmon, Navy chaplain, noting that a SARP counselor acts as a procedural recorder and reporter in helping someone through recovery, where an exclusive trait that Navy chaplain brings into such a setting is the intangible ability of being able to provide confidential support via verbal, written or even electronic means.

"Face-to-face or by social media, a chaplain can extend complete and total confidentiality to a person," Redmon said.

Another unique aspect of having a chaplain involved in a related mental health field as SARP is that they can help a SARP counselor explain and navigate any theological issues that might arise during treatment.

"There are always questions and concerns about spiritual matters and how to relate to a person. I can help take the heat off a counselor, as it were, by just being there," said Redmon.

Crouterfield asserts that mental health and Navy chaplains together form a strong lineup.

"There's a reason why the best situation is that mental health and chaplains are seen as a team. There are some things chaplains just aren't equipped to deal with. For example, when someone is struggling because they are dealing with some kind of bio-chemical issue in the brain and that person needs medication, chaplains are not equipped to deal with that. There are other psychological conditions that

really require a specialized therapist to deal with the condition. Navy chaplains aren't equipped for many of those. However, it over and over again proves beneficial for chaplains to be a part of the team and treatment plan because of what they do bring to the table," said Crouterfield, attesting that the best part of supporting Mental Health is the satisfaction that comes with caring for others.

"It is gratifying to watch many finally coming to a point where they are at peace with themselves, with others, with their God, and have a passion for the promises of the future," added Crouterfield.

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